

Web Site Development Guidelines

Using Technology Without Compromising Traditions

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Introduction

These guidelines were developed specifically for registered OA service bodies who wish to use the Internet to help inform others about the existence of Overeaters Anonymous in their area or region. As with most things in Overeaters Anonymous, these are not meant to be “rules.” They are provided to help interested OA members with specific issues related to developing an OA-related Web site.

Our Eleventh Tradition states, “We need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and other public media of communication.” The Internet is one of those “other public media of communication,” and we must be aware of Tradition issues that may arise in this new medium.

The OA members who participated in the

development of these guidelines have been involved in the design and deployment of current Web sites. Some of us are computer professionals. Others are not. We’ve experienced many of the pitfalls that can be found in cyberspace. It is our intention to share our experience, strength and hope with you about this. There is recovery—“out there”—welcome to our new tomorrow.

Who develops OA Web sites?

Members of service bodies at all levels of the OA service structure (and all levels of technical expertise) may consider developing a Web site. The World Service Office (WSO), many regions and intergroups, as well as individual OA members, have developed Web sites to disseminate information about our Fellowship. It is recommended that wherever possible a subcommittee within the service body be established to maintain the site, including having access to update data.

What information is contained in a Web site?

Generally, a Web site contains information presented in a structured, logical format.

The main or “Home” page contains general information about OA and the service body sponsoring the Web site. It may provide links to any or all of the following:

1. Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, Twelve Concepts of OA Service
2. OA copyrighted literature such as:
 - a. *Fifteen Questions*
 - b. *The Tools of Recovery*
 - c. *I Put My Hand in Yours*
 - d. *About OA*
3. Local events list
4. Local newsletter

5. Contact phone numbers
6. Meeting information
7. Literature/*Lifeline* information and ways to order
8. Other OA Web sites

Some sites may be more sophisticated than others. The sponsoring service body will decide what information it wants to provide and the level of complexity it wishes to maintain. Remember that the more complex a site, the more difficult it is to maintain. Bells and whistles are attractive, but they may not be practical or worthwhile to maintain.

How do the Traditions affect what we put on Web sites?

The Twelve Traditions are guidelines that assist us in dealing with people at our meetings and in our lives. Many of us have not faced questions that Public Information Committees at all levels of OA service have dealt with over the years. For this is what we are embarking upon: a large-scale public information effort, which in some ways is the largest public information effort ever made by Overeaters Anonymous. No matter how modest the Web site, its audience is potentially large, diverse and growing. Unlike many public information efforts, a Web site can have an ongoing effect. Once it is deployed and people know of its existence, it continues to inform the viewer as long as it exists.

In keeping with our Tradition of anonymity at the level of “other media of communication,” it might be advisable not to include full names or personal addresses. However, a first name (with or without a last initial), contact telephone number and email address (with the member’s consent if it is a personal email account) is vital to helping suffering compulsive overeaters find the help they seek in Overeaters Anonymous.

Unity: Deciding what goes into a Web site

What information to include in a Web site should be thoroughly discussed by the membership of the sponsoring service body. This includes providing information for members who may not have

computer access. To have an informed group conscience vote, make printed copies of the materials included on the site, and distribute them to members of the voting body.

Unity is best maintained with broad-based, inclusive information. Although your group might decide to include information on your site regarding special-focus meetings, remember that “our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity” (Tradition One). Keeping the information general allows us to reach as many compulsive overeaters as possible. Many of the visitors to your site will be newcomers who have little, if any, knowledge of Overeaters Anonymous.

Placing information about the Web site’s sponsoring body (name and/or logo) on each page of the site conveys the message of who we are (as a whole and your service group). As a design consideration, having the same “look and feel” on each page makes reading the material easier for the user.

Some regions request that service bodies send courtesy copies of their publications (e.g., newsletters and flyers) to their region office and/or region trustee. Upon group approval, you may choose to forward information about your Web site and its content “up/down the line.”

Newcomers: Being attractive to newcomers

On the Web, we have little time to keep a visitor’s attention. Most often, a newcomer will visit our Web site looking for something specific: perhaps a meeting nearby or someone to speak with. Make newcomer information easy to find by creating a special portal. Who doesn’t like special treatment? Here are suggestions for your newcomer portal:

1. Make your home page simple, with one choice for newcomers and another for returning members.
2. Make the message on the newcomer page attractive.
3. Include OA-approved content that is already available, such as:
 - a. “Welcome Home” (from *Lifeline Sampler*)

- b. Fifteen Questions
 - c. OA Preamble
 - d. What You Can Expect from OA (page on the OA Web site)
 - e. *Hearing is Believing* five-minute recovery audio
4. Include links to stories of recovery. These can include reprints from *Lifeline*, local stories of recovery, “Welcome Home” and reprints from local and region newsletters.
5. Consider developing an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page. Some questions to answer include (your service body can also create its own list):
- a. Do I have to believe in God to be a member?
 - b. How do I join?
 - c. How much does OA cost?
 - d. What and how much am I allowed to eat?
 - e. Is OA a religion?
 - f. How do I find a meeting near me?
 - g. I’m not an overeater but food is a problem. Is OA for me?
 - h. I went to a meeting six years ago, and it wasn’t for me. Why should I come back?
 - i. I heard I have to get a sponsor and do what that person says. I don’t want a sponsor. Can I still join?
 - j. My wife (husband, friend, son, daughter, lover, priest, boss) really needs help. What can I do to help?
 - k. Can OA help anorexics and bulimics?
 - l. Who can attend OA meetings?
 - m. Is OA a diet?
 - n. I’ve had gastric bypass surgery. Can OA help me?
 - o. How can I lose weight?
 - p. Will OA help me lose weight?
 - q. Why do people keep going after they lose the weight?
 - r. How can I get more information about a meeting before attending?
 - s. Can I speak to a member today?
 - t. Is OA affiliated with AA or any other anonymous fellowship or medical group interested in obesity?
 - u. I’m a teen. Can OA help me?
 - v. How can I get more information about a meeting before attending?
 - w. What kinds of meetings are available?
 - x. Are there telephone or online meetings?
 - y. Ask your members what newcomers are most interested in and answer those questions.
6. With permission from WSO, you may reprint excerpts from OA publications (see the Copyright Requests page on the OA Web site for more information).
7. Be sure to include easy-to-find contact information including email, telephone and postal address.

Avoiding endorsement of related facilities or outside enterprises; avoiding opinions on outside issues

As stated in the Tenth Tradition, Overeaters Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues. This consideration seems fairly easy when we talk about sites developed and maintained by non-OA organizations. We don’t endorse them, so we don’t link to sites that are not affiliated with OA. This is not as easy a consideration when we look at sites developed before guidelines were established or sites developed by individual OA members and not by registered OA service bodies. Although much of the content in these sites may be worthwhile, linking to any site not developed by a registered OA service body may create problems.

For example, sites we link to may in turn link out to sites developed and maintained by other organizations. These are outside enterprises.

When the user sees a link on a Web page, it’s as if the developer is saying, “This is a site we think well of. This page will provide you with information you might want to know.” It is an unspoken way of endorsing the linked-to site.

Many facilities such as hospitals or rehabilitation centers have Web sites. These facilities may have OA meetings on their premises and may include OA information on their Web site. This is not a problem. However, we cannot endorse the facility in return by linking to their site. If an outside organization asks to link to your OA-related site, you may grant their request. However, you cannot provide a reciprocal link on your OA site.

Another problem may be provider-included advertising. While the use of advertising, particularly on “free” Web sites is common, and regular Internet users would be aware of the fact that such advertising is not intended as an endorsement by any Overeaters Anonymous service body, it could potentially confuse a newcomer to OA or to Internet use. We encourage service bodies to find ways of remaining self-supporting by paying for their own Web sites, thus avoiding any potential confusion relating to Traditions Six and Seven.

An exception to this is linking to sites that provide the visitor with tools to help facilitate use of your site, such as Adobe Acrobat Reader and Real Player. The Board of Trustees decided that linking to such sites was a courtesy to the viewer and not an endorsement.

Self-Support on the Internet

Setting up a site on the Internet has a regular cost, which is usually reasonable, depending on the size of your site and the amount of traffic you expect it to generate.

Many Internet Service Providers (ISPs) make space available for clients as part of their monthly fees—usually a couple of megabytes of storage for a “personal” Web site. A member may want to donate his or her personal Web site space as a service to the sponsoring service body. This might seem like a viable solution; certainly it would be low cost. But what happens if the individual decides to change ISP’s? What if the person moves, decides to use the space for another purpose or drops out of OA?

Tradition Seven talks about every OA group being self-supporting. It’s best to have the service body

provide its own Internet access. This can be done in many ways: through an online service, a site provider (a company that provides facilities for your Web site and many others) or a community service body (if your service body is registered as not-for-profit, services may be available at little cost).

Problems of unintentional advertisement arise frequently with “free” web spaces. In general, you get what you pay for. The group should determine which type of service to use, but it is advisable that a service body be the responsible party and not an individual.

Remaining non-professional

Many registered OA service bodies have members who are experienced with Internet technologies or are willing to learn. These members may offer to donate their services. This is within the spirit of our Tradition of remaining non-professional. A service provided on a limited basis for a specific product falls well within the boundaries of someone being a “special worker.” An ongoing committee should be responsible to the service body as a whole (those they serve) for the maintenance and revision (when necessary) of the Web site. The service body is responsible for the contents of the Web site it sponsors.

Responsibility for page content (Web Committee)

No one may republish OA copyrighted material without permission of the WSO, including on the Internet. Any registered service body may receive permission to publish OA copyrighted literature by requesting and completing the permission form from the WSO (or using the form available on the OA, Inc. Web site at www.oa.org/services-for-members/copyright.php). Literature currently published on the OA Web site is exempt from this policy. All registered service bodies may copy those pieces without submitting a written request for permission. Additionally, any registered service body may apply for blanket permission to use the OA logo on any of its publications (e.g., flyers, posters, newsletters,

meeting lists, Web sites, stationery and business cards) for a two-year period (renewable). See the OA Web site for a detailed explanation of OA's copyright policy: www.oa.org/services-for-members/copyright.php. Copyright infringement is a common problem on the Internet, and using copyrighted material without permission has the potential of deeply affecting OA as a whole.

As a Fellowship, we own our literature. We develop, approve and maintain it. However, according to the Twelve Concepts of OA Service, we have entrusted the Board of Trustees with the administration of Overeaters Anonymous, including the legal responsibility of overseeing the protection of our property. That includes rigorous protection of our copyrights from use without permission. Anyone (including a registered OA service body) who uses OA materials without permission will be asked to cease publishing those materials. The Board of Trustees, and through them the WSO, must protect ownership of this material.

The following steps will be taken in cases of copyright infringement:

1. The region trustee (if the region is known) and the chairman of the Board of Trustees will be notified.
2. The region trustee (or the chairman of the board if the region is unknown) will contact the service body, discuss the problem and offer ways to remedy the situation.
3. If the matter cannot be resolved by the trustee and the service body involved, the Board of Trustees may, as a last resort, direct the managing director of Overeaters Anonymous to take appropriate action to preserve the rights of OA, Inc. and to resolve the issue, including notifying the Internet Service Provider and taking legal action.

Technical issues

Technical issues that arise during the development of Web sites are best discussed one-on-one. Questions regarding the specifics about coding, page structure

and other issues cannot be covered in a general overview. The Internet Service Provider selected by your service body may be able to provide you with technical assistance.

Conclusion

General things to remember:

- Design the site with newcomers in mind.
- If you decide to use OA copyrighted material or the OA logo, use the permission forms provided by the WSO, which you can find at this link: www.oa.org/services-for-members/copyright.php.
- Look carefully at any site you consider linking to for Traditions-related problems. Such issues can best be avoided by linking only to sites sponsored by other Overeaters Anonymous service bodies, including the OA, Inc. Web site: www.oa.org.
- After your site is developed, send the URL (Web site address) to the WSO.
- Create a Web Site Maintenance Committee within the service body to make ongoing revisions.
- It is suggested that pertinent Web-site information, such as login information and passwords, be held by more than one member of the group or service body.

A Web site is a useful tool to help let people who suffer from compulsive overeating know that we have found a way to recover. It just takes a little thought and effort to maintain adherence to the principles that we have learned to incorporate into our everyday lives.

Remember, "Together we can do what we could never do alone." The Internet is a way to bring more hands and hearts into our Fellowship.

Appendix A: Electronic Publishing Policy (Board Policy)

Board of Trustees Reference Manual, Section III, C. Copyright, C-2 Electronic Publishing

1. OA, Inc. may grant permission to electronically reproduce OA copyrighted material only to

- registered OA service bodies.
2. The service body shall send to the World Service Office a written request stating the specific material to be published and the URL of the Web site on which it will be published.
 3. Copyright notice must also be included above or below the items displayed as the following notation: “From (name of publication). Copyright 19__/20__ by Overeaters Anonymous, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Overeaters Anonymous, Inc. Copyrighted material may not be reproduced in any manner without written permission of OA, Inc.”
 4. We suggest that information be given on where and how to order OA literature. (This can be the service body’s order form, address or telephone number or other method for ordering literature.)
 5. The service body shall include the WSO address in addition to any local address.
 6. We suggest that you display an encouragement to subscribe to *Lifeline*.
 7. The service body shall send an exact copy of the document as it will appear on the Internet to the WSO.
 8. Permission will not be granted to reprint books.
 9. Permission shall be granted in accordance with all other copyright policies and procedures.

Appendix B: Link to copyright permission forms

www.oa.org/services-for-members/copyright.php

OA Board-approved

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